

Reduction of N₂O emissions

Background

5 Nitrous oxide (dinitrogen oxide, N₂O) makes a substantial contribution to the greenhouse effect. The global warming potential (the extent to which a molecule contributes to the greenhouse effect compared to one molecule of CO₂) of N₂O is approx. 310. For a number of years, the policy of reducing emissions of greenhouse gases has been developed. The present invention can make a significant contribution to
10 this policy. Various significant sources of N₂O emissions have been identified: agriculture, industrial production of nylon precursors (adipic acid and caprolactam), the production of nitric acid and motor vehicles fitted with a three-way catalyst.

In principle, various catalytic and non-catalytic techniques can be employed in order to render nitrous oxide harmless. Various catalysts are known for the direct
15 catalytic decomposition of N₂O to N₂ and O₂ (cf. the literature summary provided by Kapteijn et al., Appl. Catal. B9 (1996), pp 25-64 and US-A-5,171,553). However, this reaction is hampered to a considerable extent by the presence of oxygen and water, which are to be found in the off-gases from virtually all the N₂O sources listed above. Selective catalytic reduction is a promising alternative. Various catalysts for the
20 conversion of N₂O with the aid of olefins (C_nH_{2n}), alcohols or ammonia have been studied in the literature (recently: Mauzevin et al. Appl. Catal. B23 (1999) L79-L82 and Pophal et al. Appl Catal. B16 (1998) pp. 177-186 and the literature cited therein). Catalysts employed are often zeolites which have been substituted with a transition metal, such as iron, cobalt or copper.

25 For both technical and economic reasons, the addition of saturated hydrocarbons (C_nH_{2n+2}) would be preferable to the abovementioned reducing agents. Natural gas (CH₄) and LPG (mixture of C₃H₈ and C₄H₁₀) are particularly attractive in this context. It is important that the formation and emission of carbon monoxide (CO) and emission of unreacted hydrocarbons be minimized.

30 The present invention relates to a catalyst which enables N₂O to be converted into nitrogen at a relatively low temperature and which allows very low emissions of CO and hydrocarbons to be achieved.

Prior art

35 International Patent Application WO 9949954 has described a method for the catalytic reduction of N₂O in the presence of a zeolite with the addition of a reducing agent, the reducing agent used being a saturated hydrocarbon, such as methane (CH₄), propane (C₃H₈), LPG (C₃H₈/C₄H₁₀), or a combination of these reducing agents. It has

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been found that complete conversion of N_2O can be achieved at reaction temperatures of $400^\circ C$ or lower, even with very low concentrations of the reducing agent and in the presence of water vapour, oxygen and sulphur dioxide. The catalyst involves a specially prepared iron-substituted zeolite.

5 Japanese patent publications JP 05103953 and JP 07213864 describe the removal of N_2O in the presence of, respectively, methane and propane with the aid of (inter alia) and iron-zeolite catalyst. However, these methods take no account of the emission of CO and unreacted hydrocarbons.

10 To prevent undesirable emission of CO and residual hydrocarbons, Japanese patent publication JP 09000884 describes the mechanical mixing of an iron-zeolite catalyst with a supported platinum or palladium catalyst. The N_2O conversion is around 60% at $450^\circ C$ in a gas which contains oxygen and water. The conversion of N_2O achieved with the mechanically mixed catalyst is significantly worse than with the iron-zeolite catalyst alone.

15 JP 05103953, JP 07213864 and JP 09000884 all lack information about the effectiveness of the invention under pressure and/or in the presence of sulphur compounds. This is essential for use in the production of nitric acid and caprolactam, respectively.

20 **Discovery of a novel catalyst**

One object of the present invention is to provide a method for the removal of N_2O from industrial gas streams which contain O_2 , H_2O , NO_x and possibly sulphur and which may be at elevated pressure. A further object of the present invention is to bring about the abovementioned removal of N_2O by the addition of saturated hydrocarbons at a reaction temperature of lower than $400^\circ C$, with very low emissions of CO and unreacted hydrocarbons.

25 To this end, the method according to the invention is characterized in that the catalyst used is a promoted, iron-containing zeolite. The zeolite catalyst is preferably promoted with a precious metal.

30 The use of an iron-containing zeolite catalyst which has been promoted preferably with precious metal (Rh, Pd, Ru, Pt, Au, etc.) in the SCR of N_2O with the aid of saturated hydrocarbons (C_nH_{2n+2}) has surprisingly led to increased conversion of N_2O compared to an unpromoted iron-containing zeolite catalyst. The promoted catalyst is active at temperatures of below $350^\circ C$.

35 Furthermore, it has been found that the iron-containing zeolite catalyst which has been promoted with precious metal reduces the emissions of CO and residual

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hydrocarbons very considerably at the operating temperature compared to an unpromoted iron-containing zeolite catalyst.

In addition, it has been found that the catalyst according to the invention is also active in the removal of nitrogen oxides ($\text{NO} + \text{NO}_2 = \text{NO}_x$). This is important in view of the fact that NO_x are also released from the various sources of N_2O .

It has also been found that the catalyst described is also very active in the desired conversion at elevated process pressure, at which it is even more active than at atmospheric pressure. This is an important fact with regard to its application in the nitric acid industry.

Finally, it has been found that the catalyst described is active if sulphur is present in the feed. This is an important fact in connection with its application in the nylon industry.

The invention will be explained in more detail with reference to the following examples together with the associated figures, in which:

Figure 1 shows the degree of conversion of N_2O as a function of temperature for four iron-containing zeolite catalysts promoted with precious metal (A, D, E and F). For comparison purposes, the N_2O conversion achieved by an unpromoted iron-containing zeolite catalyst (X) is also shown. The test conditions are described in Table 2 ($\text{SV} = 19,500 \text{ h}^{-1}$, pressure = 3 bara, C_3H_8 concentration = 1900 ppmv).

Figure 2 shows the CO emissions which occur during the conversion of N_2O using the same catalysts and under the same conditions as in Figure 1.

I. Preparation of the catalysts

The catalysts according to the present invention are produced by adding zeolite Na-ZSM-5 or NH_4 -ZSM-5 to a solution of $(\text{NH}_4)_2\text{Fe}(\text{SO}_4)_2 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (Mohr's salt). After they have been combined, ion exchange is carried out for 8 hours at 80°C . The resulting suspension is filtered, the solid material is washed, is dried at 80°C and is calcined at 550°C .

The Fe-ZSM-5 base material obtained in this way is then impregnated with a volume of a solution of a precious metal precursor in demineralized water which is such that the pores of the base material are precisely filled (so-called incipient wetness impregnation). The concentration of the precious metal precursor is set in such a manner that the desired quantity of precious metal on the base material is obtained. Finally, the catalyst is dried at 80°C and calcined at 550°C . The catalyst powder obtained is pressed into a tablet, is ground and is screened.

— The following catalysts are used in the examples:

Table 1

Catalyst	Base	Precious metal
A	Fe-ZSM-5 from Mohr's salt	0.05% Pd
B	Fe-ZSM-5 from Mohr's salt	0.1% Pd
C	Fe-ZSM-5 from Mohr's salt	0.3% Pd
D	Fe-ZSM-5 from Mohr's salt	0.3% Rh
E	Fe-ZSM-5 from Mohr's salt	0.3% Ru
F	Fe-ZSM-5 from Mohr's salt	0.3% Au
X	Fe-ZSM-5 from Mohr's salt	none

II. Test apparatus

5 The conversion of N_2O by means of SCR using propane and methane was studied in an automated flow arrangement. The gases N_2 , air, N_2O , C_3H_8 , CH_4 , NO , NO_2 are introduced by means of calibrated mass flow controllers (Brooks). Water is added via a Liquiflow controller and a controlled Evaporator Mixer (Bronkhorst). The gases emerging are analysed by means of a calibrated FTIR spectrophotometer (Elsag, Bailey, Hartmann & Brown, type MB 100). The catalyst is in a stainless steel reactor. The gases are passed through a preheating section before they come into contact with the catalyst. The temperature at the entry to and exit from the catalyst bed is measured using thermocouples. The mean of these two temperatures is shown in the results of the tests. The pressure in the test arrangement can be set at levels of between 1 and 5 bar absolute (bara).

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The gas composition in the examples is representative for use of the catalyst according to the present invention in the nitric acid industry. The general test conditions are as follows:

Table 2

Weight of catalyst	6 – 15 g
Screening fraction	0.71 – 1.4 mm
Volume of catalyst	10 – 23 ml
Total gas flow rate	5 – 7.5 l/min (STP)
Space velocity	13,000 – 45,000 h ⁻¹
Total pressure	1 – 5 bara
Temperature of catalyst	150 – 500 °C
O ₂ concentration	2.5% v/v
H ₂ O concentration	0.5% v/v
N ₂ O concentration	1500 ppmv
C ₃ H ₈ concentration	1500 – 2500 ppmv
NO ₂ concentration	100 ppmv
NO concentration	100 ppmv

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III. Influence of the addition of precious metal to iron-containing zeolite

Figure 1 shows the N₂O conversion curves for the catalyst from Table 1 (test conditions as in Table 2, SV = 19,500 h⁻¹, pressure = 3 bara, C₃H₈ concentration = 1900 ppmv). The promoted catalyst (A,D,E,F) are more active than the unpromoted iron-containing zeolite catalyst X. This is evident from the shift of the N₂O conversion curves towards a lower temperature compared to the unpromoted Fe-ZSM-5 catalyst X.

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Figure 2 shows the CO concentrations as a function of temperature for the same catalysts under the same conditions. When using catalyst X and catalyst F, CO is

formed throughout the entire temperature range. The other catalysts are excellent at eliminating CO emissions: if catalyst E is used, the amount of CO at over 350°C is lower than 10 ppmv, and with catalysts A and D this level is already achieved from 300°C.

- 5 Comparative tests between catalyst A (containing 0.05% Pd) and catalysts B and C (respectively containing 0.1% and 0.3% Pd) reveal similar curves for both N₂O conversion and CO formation. This means that a low concentration of precious metal is sufficient, reducing the cost of the catalyst.

- 10 Table 3 shows the concentrations of the compounds which leave the reactor at a mean temperature of 350°C for a number of catalysts (test conditions as in Table 2, SV = 19,500 h⁻¹, pressure = 3 bara, C₃H₈ concentration = 1900 ppmv).

Table 3

Catalyst	N ₂ O (ppmv)	C ₃ H ₈ (ppmv)	CO (ppmv)	NO _x ^a (ppmv)
C	70	62	3	85
D	55	33	1	85
E	130	75	37	82
F	42	70	2180	45
X	123	167	2267	46

^aNO_x = NO + NO₂

- 15 For all the catalysts, the N₂O and C₃H₈ conversion levels are higher than 90% at 350°C. For the catalysts which contain Pd and Rh, the CO emission is negligible. Another surprise is that the catalysts also remove from 60 to 75% of the NO_x.

IV. Activity of the promoted iron-containing zeolite catalysts at increased process pressure and space velocity

- 20 Increasing the process pressure has a beneficial affect on the activity of the catalysts. Table 4 shows the concentrations of a number of components of the emerging gas, at 1, 3 and 5 bara and at a reaction temperature of 350°C (test conditions as in Table 2, catalyst A, SV = 19,500h⁻¹, C₃H₈ concentration = 1900 ppmv). The N₂O

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conversion level remains greater than 90%, while propane slippage, CO and NO_x emissions fall as the process pressure rises.

Table 4

Pressure (bara)	N ₂ O (ppmv)	C ₃ H ₈ (ppmv)	CO (ppmv)	NO _x ^a (ppmv)
1	95	200	14	137
3	128	124	3	135
5	100	54	2	122

^aNO_x = NO + NO₂

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At a process pressure of 4 bara and under conditions as in Table 2 (catalyst A, SV = 13,000 h⁻¹), increased activity was measured when the propane concentration was increased from 1500 to 2000 ppmv. Further increasing the propane/N₂O ratio had no further positive effect on the conversion of N₂O.

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Experiments under conditions as in Table 2 (catalyst A, pressure = 4 bara, C₃H₈ concentration = 1900 ppmv) indicate that the space velocity can be increased from 13,000 to 45,000 h⁻¹ without the activity of the catalyst being adversely affected.

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The stability of the catalyst is tested for 50 hours in the conditions as described in Table 2. No deterioration in the activity was detected.

V. N₂O conversion in different gas compositions

Table 5 demonstrates that the catalyst according to the present invention also functions well with higher water concentrations and higher oxygen concentrations. The table describes experiments in different gas compositions (conditions as in Table 2, catalyst B, SV = 13,000 h⁻¹, no NO and NO₂ present)

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Table 5

Feed				Reaction T = 350°C	
N ₂ O (ppmv)	C ₃ H ₈ (ppmv)	O ₂ (% v/v)	H ₂ O (% v/v)	N ₂ O-conversion	CO (ppmv)
500	1000	6	0.5	97%	3
500	1000	3	0.5	97%	2
500	1000	2	0.5	84%	3
1000	1000	2	0.5	90%	2
1000	500	2	0.5	82%	2
500	1000	6	2	94%	2
1000 ^a	1000	2	0.5	73% ^a	1 ^a

^a In the presence of 250 ppmv NO

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The catalyst X was tested in the presence of SO₂ (500 ppmv N₂O, 500 ppmv C₃H₈, 6% H₂O, 500 ppmv NO, 160 ppmv SO₂, SV = 6000 h⁻¹, T = 440-460°C). The catalyst is able to withstand sulphur: no deactivation was detected over a period of 550 hours under the above conditions.

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